

First Nationally Protected River System

For the purpose of conserving and interpreting unique scenic and other natural values and objects of historic interest, including preservation of portions of the Current River and the Jacks Fork River as free-flowing streams, preservation of springs and caves, management of wildlife, and provisions for use and enjoyment of the outdoor recreation resources thereof by the people of the United States.

—Public Law 88-492, August 27, 1964

Ozark National Scenic Riverways was the first national park to protect a river system in its wild, undammed state. The movement for the park started as a grassroots reaction to plans for building a series of dams on the Current River. This would have created a lake where the two rivers now flow. Local residents and conservation groups disagreed on how to preserve the rivers, but most agreed the rivers should be kept free-flowing.

In 1964, after much debate and compromise, Congress established Ozark National Scenic Riverways. The State of Missouri donated three state parks—Alley Spring, Big Spring, and Round Spring—to the National Park Service, for the American people. Land along the rivers between the former state parks was purchased, and the whole area knitted together as America's first national river park. The successful effort became the prototype for the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, which now protects many of the nation's free-flowing rivers.

Since 1964 millions of people have come here to enjoy the rivers' beauty and the many recreational opportunities they offer. Canoeing and kayaking are popular, as are hiking, camping, and birding. Spring wildflowers and autumn leaf colors are spectacular. The park will continue to protect the rivers and the watershed to ensure that you and generations to come will enjoy these natural and cultural resources.

Early emigrants built farmsteads and mills along the rivers. In the late 1800s heavy logging depleted forests and other natural resources in the watershed. Tourism increased in the early 1900s as people bought cars. Improved roads and new bridges enticed urban visitors. The Ozarks became a popular vacation destination.

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Caves, Springs, and Karst

The Ozark landscape is a three-dimensional watershed. Water runs across the land's surface in streams and creeks, down through cracks at different levels, and in underground rivers.

Springs form where these underground rivers burst onto the surface. The park is home to more first-magnitude springs (springs with daily flows of over 65 million gallons of water) in one area than anywhere else on Earth. These springs offer people beauty and respite, and they supply most of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers' flow. About 81 million gallons gush daily from Alley Spring, while Big Spring's daily flow averages 286 million gallons.

This geological landscape, called karst, is riddled with caves and springs created as groundwater dissolves soluble rock like the sedimentary rock called dolomite. As water flows from crack to crack, small underground chambers grow larger and longer, forming submerged caves. These caves are revealed when the springs and underground rivers run dry. Some of the park's more than 400 caves, such as Round Spring Cave, are beautifully decorated with stalactites and stalagmites.

Other karst features here include sinkholes like Devils Well, formed when the top of an underground cave collapsed, and "losing streams" like Sinking Creek, where much of the surface water drains into cracks in the bedrock. Water moving from the surface through this fractured bedrock and into groundwater and local wells is not purified. We must protect this resource from pollution—it is our only source of drinking water.

People of the Hollows

Native Americans traveled these hills and hollows for centuries, following the seasons and food sources. Spanish explorers in the 1500s and the French in the late 1600s had contact with Tribes that lived in villages, grew crops, and hunted deer and bison. With the arrival of European and other cultures, life changed for Indigenous peoples. By the late 1800s the federal government had removed most of them to reservations.

In the mid-1800s American-born settlers of mainly Scots-Irish heritage established small hamlets along rivers and springs. Families practiced subsistence farming and gradually built trading networks that used the rivers for transportation. Social relationships centered on family and local communities. Commercial settlements gave rural people an incentive to come together. They gathered to share ideas at mills, stores, and one-room schools as well as on the rivers.

Railroads brought commerce with the larger world and demanded wood for ties, trestles, and fuel for steam engines before coal became the fuel of choice. By the late 1800s thousands of acres of Ozark forests disappeared. In this boom-and-bust economy, resources ran out or markets dried up.

The Current and Jacks Fork rivers acted as highways long before roads were passable. Ferries operated until modern bridges replaced them. In the mid-1920s automobile travel took hold with the establishment of state parks. Outfitting and guide operations sprang up. Most used wooden jonboats, which were inexpensive to build and—with their square, flat-bottom hull design—easy to navigate on shallow rivers and sandbars.

Today oral traditions and practical recreation reign: storytelling, hunting, fishing, trapping, picnicking, and especially family reunions. The Ozarks' regional culture relies on local resources and approaches life with respect for loyal kinship and personal independence.

Journey of Free-Flowing Water

This area of boiling waters at the foot of the high, vertical, bare bluff of dolomite rock is a dramatic sight—clear, brawling waters that seem to leap to the surface, freed from the confinement of their underground channels. —Henry Claus Beckman and Norman Shreve Hinchey, in *The Large Springs of Missouri, 1944*

Water gurgling out of the ground has fascinated people for millennia. Some springs in Ozark National Scenic Riverways gush rather than gurgle—in powerful, rolling, steady bursts, some amounting to millions of gallons of water every day.

Groundwater plays a premier role in this spectacular national park. The springs' flow reveals subterranean rivers that course through the eroded dolomite subsurface and help carve the water table ever deeper into the landscape. It features underground caverns and surface rivers that move from underground to the surface.

The area captured the attention of Congress in the 1960s, which authorized the 134 miles of rivers in 1964 as the first national scenic riverway. The dams that harnessed many American rivers awakened the nation to the natural, scenic, and recreational values of these free-flowing rivers.

Each week the larger springs pour billions of gallons of clear, cold water into the Current and Jacks Fork rivers, the heart of Ozark National Scenic Riverways. This park exists to protect these largely spring-fed streams, which run through some of the Ozarks' most beautiful scenery.

As residents from St. Louis and other cities were drawn to recreation in the Ozarks, river activities took on new meanings. People developed an appreciation of hiking, fishing, and family outings. Today this area is valued for how it preserves nature and offers outdoor recreation. Over 1.5 million visitors per year enjoy the quality of life ensured by the rivers' protected status—which only a tiny percentage of the nation's rivers share.

Ozark Habitats

CAVES

A cave environment challenges wildlife. Animals must adapt to conditions of darkness, cool temperatures, and high humidity. They also need quality groundwater to survive. Bats come and go, finding food outside the cave while using it for shelter, hibernation, sleep, and raising their pups. Other animals, like grotto species, are often blind but adapted for cave life with other acutely developed senses. All caves in the park are closed to stop the spread of white-nose syndrome, a highly contagious disease affecting bat populations.

SPRINGS

Large and small springs punctuate the Ozark landscape. They function as mouths for underground rivers, attracting plants and wildlife where the reliable flow, chemistry, and water temperature provide a stable habitat. Watercress, duckweed, and other plants provide organic matter for animals and habitat for aquatic insects. At least 38 animal species are found only in Ozark springs and subterranean waters—and nowhere else on Earth. Springs and spring branches are sensitive ecosystems. Please do not wade, fish, or swim in area springs.

RIVERS

The rivers are home to scores of fish and other animals. Wading birds like great blue herons stalk the banks looking for snacks. Kingfishers dive to snatch unwary meals—perhaps a goggle-eyed bass. Green herons patrol gravel bars looking for small creatures. Watershed changes—pesticides, stream disturbance, and development in areas outside park boundaries—threaten the rivers' ecosystems. One affected species is the Ozark hellbender, a salamander that can live for 30 years and weigh up to four pounds.

FLOODPLAINS

These free-flowing rivers flood often, washing nutrient-rich mud and silt onto adjacent floodplains. Water may cover flat areas several times a year—or not at all. River cane, the only native bamboo, once grew here in vast thickets called canebrakes. Early-1800s emigrants used the cane for animal fodder. When the overgrazed cane disappeared, farmers planted crops in the bare fields. Today canebrakes are being restored along riverbanks, slowing erosion and providing nesting for rare Swainson's warblers.

FORESTS

Ozark forests testify to nature's resilience. A century ago, timber companies supplying lumber to the rapidly developing nation nearly stripped the hills bare. Large white oaks and shortleaf pine (Missouri's only native pine) now cover the hillsides. Sycamore and oaks thrive alongside rivers. Dogwood (Missouri's state tree) decorates the understory, providing shade for ferns and wildflowers. From white-tailed deer to chipmunks, wildlife find shelter and food in these recovering forests, where tall larkspur and other rare species grow.

GLADES

Dry rocky areas on hilltops, or glades, are much like deserts with bare rock and gravel exposed to the harsh summer sun. Glades require periodic fire to keep them open by killing encroaching trees. Cracks in the rocks might harbor just enough soil for a clump of grass or a showy patch of glade coneflowers. A collared lizard may use a rock to watch its territory or find its next meal—perhaps a scorpion or a tarantula. Prairie warblers can be seen from May to August in area glades.

Cave crayfish



Gray bat



Bullfrog in duckweed



Black periwinkle



Hellbender



Goggle-eyed bass



River cane



Swainson's warbler



Tall Larkspur



Eastern chipmunk



Prairie warbler



Glade coneflowers



Grotto salamander

Red-eared slider

GROTTO SALAMANDER—WILLIAM R. ELLIOTT; MISSOURI DEPT. OF CONSERVATION; RED-EARED SLIDER—© GREGORY G. DRISMAN; PHOTO RESEARCH; EASTERN COLLARED LIZARD—© HIBB PHOTOGRAPHY

Eastern collared lizard



WELCH SPRING AND HOSPITAL
Welch Spring is the seventh largest in Missouri, adding 105 million gallons per day into the Current River. In 1913 Dr. C. H. Diehl bought the property and built the stone hospital over the mouth of a cave attached to the passage from which Welch Spring flows. He believed that air from the spring would circulate throughout the hospital and help heal "consumption," as asthma, emphysema, and tuberculosis were then known. *Welch Spring is on Route K north of Akers. It is also accessible from the river.*



BIG SPRING
Water roars from the ground at an average rate of 286 million gallons per day, making Big Spring the largest spring in Missouri and among the largest in the nation. Some of the water rising here has traveled over 50 miles underground to the spring. *The trails and park are open year-round. Big Spring is on MO Hwy. 103, 3 miles south of Van Buren.*



ROUND SPRING CAVE
Ranger-led lantern tours take two hours to explore the Ozarks' unseen geology. Wear sturdy shoes and a jacket. Areas may be slippery. The cave is 58°F year-round. You must climb stairs to get to the cave. Stopping is required inside. No reservations are needed, but group size is limited. *Open Memorial Day through Labor Day. Fee. Round Spring Cave is on MO Hwy. 19, 12.5 miles north of Eminence.*



ALLEY MILL
The three-story mill and turquoise water are a photographer's delight. Most of the equipment, including a turbine and rollers, remains in place. A one-room schoolhouse is nearby. *The grounds are open year-round; the mill is open Memorial Day weekend through October. Free. Alley Mill is on MO Hwy. 106, 6 miles west of Eminence.*



BLUE SPRING, CURRENT RIVER
At 310 feet Blue Spring is one of Missouri's deepest. If the Statue of Liberty stood on the bottom, her torch would be underwater. The color comes from minerals dissolved during the water's underground journey. A 0.5-mile trail starts at the parking lot. *The spring and trail are open year-round. Free. The spring is off MO Hwy. 106, 12 miles east of Eminence.*



ROCKY FALLS
Rocky Falls is an example of a shut-in, an Ozark term for a stream or river narrowly confined by unique stone layers. A steep cascade pours into a pool of water. Part of the Ozark Trail passes by the falls. *The trails and park are open year-round. Free. Rocky Falls is off MO Rt. NN, 9 miles southeast of Eminence.*



BIG SPRING HISTORIC DISTRICT
Designated Missouri's first state park in 1924, this area was a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) project in the 1930s. CCC crews built trails, roads, bridges, picnic shelters, and buildings. *The trails and park are open year-round. The district is on MO 103, south of Van Buren.*

Planning Your Visit

Things To See and Do Many people come to Ozark National Scenic Riverways for its refreshing water and premier opportunities for boating, floating, and fishing. In addition to paddling, you can camp, hike, tour historic sites, examine springs, ride horseback, and join ranger-led activities (offered seasonally).

When To Visit The park is open year-round. Most people float the rivers from late May through Labor Day. Weekends in summer are especially crowded. If you enjoy solitude or discovering wildlife, visit on a weekday or in the off-season.

Lodging, Food, Services, and Camping Neighboring communities offer lodging, food, and services. For details about camping and services in the park, see the chart below or visit the park website.

Family-Friendly Park The park, partners, and communities are working together to clean up the riverways—and it is making a difference. Rowdy behavior, excessive noise, and drug or alcohol abuse are not tolerated. All laws are strictly enforced. For information about laws and policies, including firearms regulations, contact the park or visit the park website.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

Your Safety Is Your Responsibility If you get hurt, you may be a long way from help. Cell phone service is unavailable in most areas. Getting medical help to you can be difficult. Please enjoy the park safely.

Regulations and Safety Tips Springs are delicate ecosystems and more sensitive to disturbance than rivers. Protect plants, animals, and water quality. Do not pick plants, drink the water, wade, swim, or fish in springs or spring branches. • Do not swing from ropes or dive or jump from trees or cliffs. These activities can lead to serious injury or death. • Caves are closed to protect bats; obey closure signs. • Glass containers are prohibited on canoes, kayaks, inner tubes, and other non-motorized vessels. • Pets must be on a leash. Do not leave pets in vehicles or unattended. • Visit the park website for hunting, trapping, and fishing regulations. • Use fire rings and grills; extinguish all campfires. • Be alert for venomous snakes, poison ivy, ticks, and stinging insects. Watch where you step, sit, and place your

hands. Wear insect repellent. • Carry plenty of fresh water and wear sunscreen. • ATVs and ORVs are not allowed in streams and off-road; ride on unpaved roads only.

Safety on the Rivers Always wear a life jacket (PFD). Children age six and younger must wear a PFD on the river. • Swim at your own risk; there are no lifeguards. • NEVER tie a person or pet in a watercraft. Do not tie tubes or canoes together. • If you hang up on a rock or log, lean downstream to keep water from filling the canoe. • If you capsize, stay upstream from the canoe to avoid being pinned against a rock or log. • As you approach obstacles, look for a glassy "V" pointed downstream. This is the chute, the safest route through. • Flashfloods are a risk at all times. Watch the weather and be aware of changing river levels. • Inboard motors and motorized personal watercraft (PWC) are prohibited.

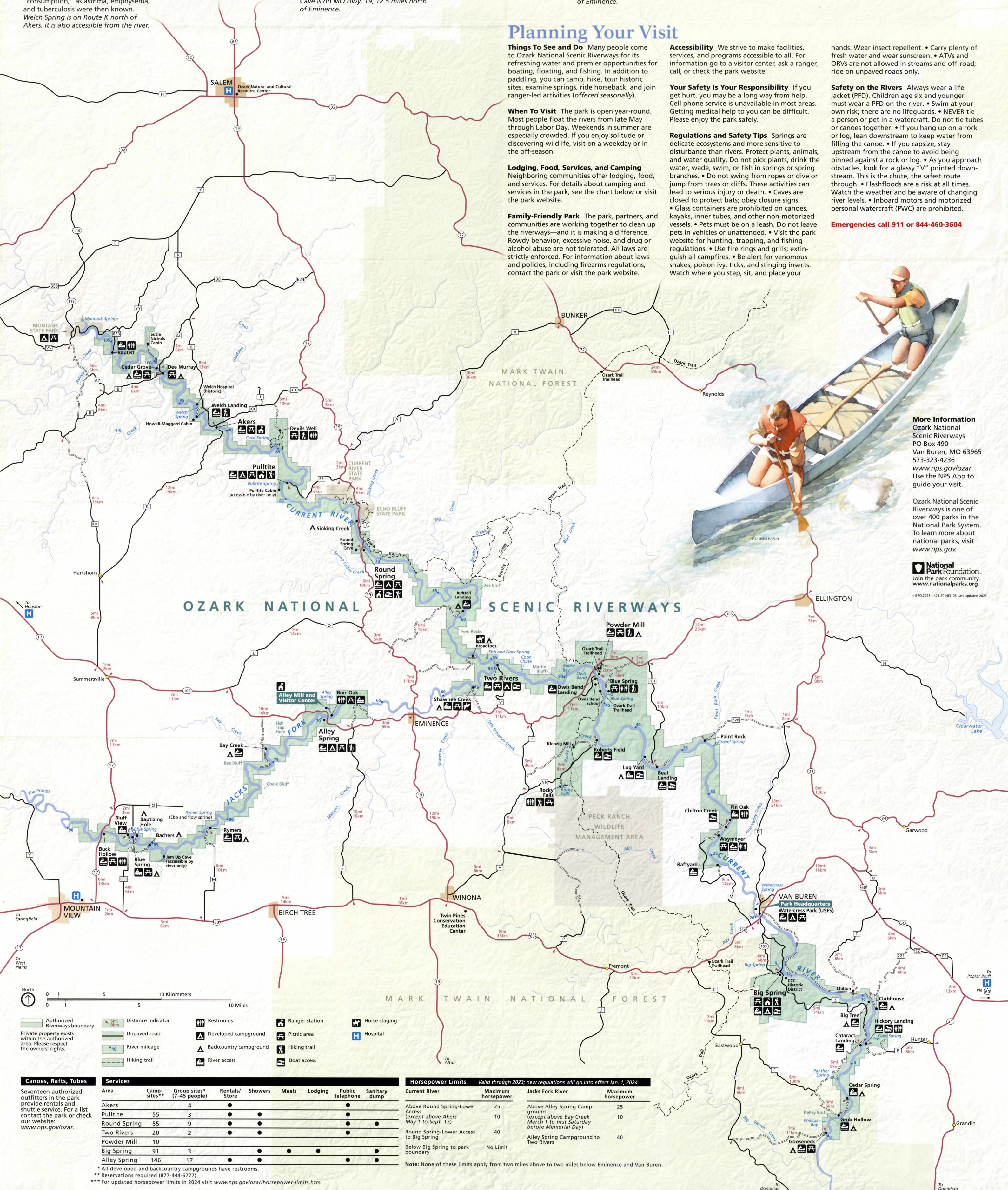
Emergencies call 911 or 844-460-3604

More Information
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
PO Box 490
Van Buren, MO 63965
573-323-4236
www.nps.gov/ozar
Use the NPS App to guide your visit.

Ozark National Scenic Riverways is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation.
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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Canoes, Rafts, Tubes

Seventeen authorized outfitters in the park provide rentals and shuttle service. For a list contact the park or check our website: www.nps.gov/ozar.

Services

Area	Camp-sites**	Group sites* (7-45 people)	Rentals/Store	Showers	Meals	Lodging	Public telephone	Sanitary dump
Akers	4	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Pulltite	55	3	•	•	•	•	•	•
Round Spring	55	9	•	•	•	•	•	•
Two Rivers	20	2	•	•	•	•	•	•
Powder Mill	10	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Big Spring	91	3	•	•	•	•	•	•
Alley Spring	146	17	•	•	•	•	•	•

* All developed and backcountry campgrounds have restrooms.

** Reservations required (877-444-6777).

*** For updated horsepower limits in 2024 visit www.nps.gov/ozar/horsepower-limits.htm

Horsepower Limits

Valid through 2023; new regulations will go into effect Jan. 1, 2024

Current River	Maximum horsepower	Jacks Fork River	Maximum horsepower
Above Round Spring-Lower Access (except above Akers May 1 to Sept. 15)	25	Above Alley Spring Camp-ground (except above Bay Creek March 1 to first Saturday before Memorial Day)	25
Round Spring-Lower Access to Big Spring	10	Alley Spring Campground to Two Rivers	10
Below Big Spring to park boundary	40		40
	No Limit		

Note: None of these limits apply from two miles above to two miles below Eminence and Van Buren.